

Dear Senators,

I wish to voice my opinion re the US Free Trade Agreement, in particular, aspects relating to the Film & Television Industry. As a film editor who's worked in a number of countries in the region, but mostly in Australia, I've always been proud of and indeed grateful for the support given to the Industry by way of local content quotas.

In my view there are two major issues here. Firstly, when I say "grateful" I mean grateful for employment opportunities in my chosen profession of Film/Video production(I've had other occupations to keep me going in the lean times). It's an up & down industry at the best of times. If local content and hence demand for local production personnel were to diminish the impact would be obvious.

Secondly, it's cultural. I think it's fantastic that we can view content from all over the world on TV and in the Cinema, but isn't it important to see ourselves reflected in Media-Arts, predominantly television. I can just imagine an overseas visitor flicking thru the channels on their hotel telly and thinking, "what country am I in?...must be the jetlag!". Plain and simple, we must protect our cultural media industry as other countries do for good reason!

I know you've probably had a barrage of similar type badgering communications from the media industry. That's 'cos we think it's important. Not only to us for future employment prospects, but out of concern for the viewing habits of future generations, ie our kids.

Given your many commitments as political representatives, I don't wish to go on about the specific points in question, suffice to say that a number of us have serious concerns as to the implementation of the agreement, should it be ratified.

Heaven forbid is it possible for us to stand up for our cultural rights. The right to watch some of our own programs, even if they are a bit daggy sometimes. There'll always be new stuff to take its place, with your help.

Finally, imagine the shoe on the other foot. "Here we go" you say. The US is a huge complicated mother of a market, silly to think we could impose our content on them in the first place. Little insignificant country, big important country.....However, it's a useful analogy. Given the aggressive protectionism of their own (media) industry, the scenario emerges. Following a viewing of our latest drama.... "what thu heel'dee say...ahee hee.... rewind that ageen . Hey, why don't you use that Steve Irwin fella, now he's entertaining!" On the whole a feasible idea following some speech elocution lessons for the actors. Parodies and cultural stereotypes aside, I think the point is valid.

In concluding, I acknowledge the economic benefits sought through this agreement, however I reckon it's time to act on principal and cultural integrity(what the!) in the interests of our Media Industry and community at large. Bugger it! Let's have a say in what comes through our screens. Pete Jackson did. Now Hollywood comes to him.

Yours Sincerely,

Shaun Smith
Chairman, Victorian committee
Australian Scareen Editor's Guild